Introduction: Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma

The two topics of sexuality and the Holocaust are connected by profound discomfort but also immense public interest. These two poles — stigma and fascination, or as Elizabeth Heineman’s presciently termed it, “doubly unspeakable” — are interconnected, one engendering the other’s power and pull.¹ How are we to make sense of its lasting strength? This special issue seeks to examine how stigma connected to sexuality in the Holocaust is created, maintained, and what functions is serves. Stigmatizing a topic, in particular a sexual one, has a function: it endows it with an established meaning. This mechanism is particularly powerful in the context of the Holocaust, the iconic genocide of European modern history, because it does not fit among the normative subject deemed are narratable in the Holocaust context. This special issue invites the readers to reconsider. The articles in front of you show how understanding sexuality renders the people in the Holocaust more human, and real.

Rather than taking the stigma of sexuality as a given, this issue suggest we put it under the microscope and analyze its societal function in the context at hand. Finally, and this is a political dimension of this research, we endeavor to subvert it by making these stories known. To go beyond stigma is hard, as it belongs to the most ingrained pillars of a society: as Jennifer Evans reminds us, we need to denaturalize our current frames of reference.² The key task at hand, we argue, is to critically approach certain expressions of sexuality as taboo, while others might be easily explored. Why has it been easier to examine the intimate lives of perpetrators as opposed to that of victims, why heterosexual unions and reproductive sex and not same sex desire? Instead of established assumption - such as that certain experience were always already terrible, that there could be no agency or pleasure in moments of danger - the challenge is historicizing sexuality. The essays invite us to reconsider fixed sexual identities as gay or straight; of sex

² J. Evans, ‘Why Queer German History?’ German History 34, 3 (September 2016), pp. 371–384, 375.
worker or respectable woman; of sexual violence as a priori destructive. Such an approach is a step on the way towards a more inclusive, less judgmental, and a more just history.

One example how stigma is internalized by normative assumptions is the discussion around Jewish children prisoners’ participation in sexual barter. Some children in the Theresienstadt Family Camp in Auschwitz became part of its sexual economy in selling the sex work of their mothers or sisters, or procuring that of other women’s for their prisoner functionaries.3 Rather than lamenting the children’s actions as deplorable and a sign of moral collapse (which is the framework in which the survivors usually recounted such stories), it is more useful see it as a sign of changing moral economy which, for the young inmates, moved quickly, forcing them to adapt to new situations on the fly. This kind of questioning adds depth where there is flatness and nuance to truisms.

Another expedient function of stigmatization is that it indicates a disturbance threatening the social order, allowing us to understand the order of things. Take for instance the widely spread fear of queer desire in the monosexual camps: It was a tool of othering, one that helped make sense of the violent, horrifying, upside down world of the camps. Some of this homophobia was based on ascriptions of othering, some took place in the context of wide-spread sexual violence that was both heterosexual and queer. Dorota Glowacka’s essay shows that victims of male rape were often profoundly ashamed, because they experienced the assault as destruction of their gender identity, and end of family. In addition, the victims have internalized the homophobia so that they stressed the fact that they themselves were heterosexual, as opposed to their homosexual perpetrators.

Finally, a powerful evidence that stigma is a social construction comes from examples where it lost its bite: LGBT persecution, a topic eschewed by Holocaust survivors and historians,

has become a legitimate topic of inquiry.\textsuperscript{4} The push for the change was made by activists,\textsuperscript{5} by the publication of gay survivor memoirs, and the arrival of the topic in academic history, where it finally was taken up as part of the official commemoration of the victims on Nazism.\textsuperscript{6} This public acceptance, which has taken fifty years, has been slow and halting: For instance, the chairman of the Bundestag has still not allowed the representatives of LGBT victims to speak at the Holocaust Memorial Day in the German Parliament, unlike most other victims of Nazism.\textsuperscript{7} Still, gays and lesbians are today largely recognized as the victims of Nazi persecution. In doing so, this recognition could come at cost of exclusion and marginalization for others. We will need to be mindful of these issues even when endeavoring to implement a more progressive methodology.

The articles in front of you follow three tasks: they offer original contributions on new themes of sexuality, Holocaust, and Nazism; they provide a roadmap for new research; and they explore how stigma attached to intimacy and the genocide operates. Throughout, we study gender roles and stigma in the context of Holocaust sexualities. First, this introduction presents some background on sexuality in the Holocaust. Next, it sketches out the key issues on the intersection of stigmatized sexuality and Holocaust: sexual violence, sex work, and queerness. The final sections discuss the main methodological and ethical challenges and make suggestions for future directions of research.

Why do we need a history of sexuality of the Holocaust? In sexuality, we can observe key features of a society and its change.\textsuperscript{8} It presents tools to examine the dynamics of asymmetrical


\textsuperscript{6} Heger; Evans, „Why Queer German History,“ 373.

\textsuperscript{7} L. van Dijk, „Nie wieder“ – Auch für Homosexuelle,“ Tagesspiegel, 27 January 2020.

relationships and the stabilizing and destabilizing effects of intimacy. In the extreme violence of Nazi genocide, sexuality served numerous ends. Sexuality unified and also divided people. It allowed pleasure, intimacy, and emotional connection. It was a resource and tool of barter, governance, and dehumanization. Rather than dismissing the nexus of sexuality and the Holocaust as perverse and unnatural, because it is so upsetting, a focus on sexuality allows us to understand and empathize with the protagonists, be it victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. At its worst, it fostered exclusion and enabled genocide. It served a statement of hierarchy and status, as well as a normalizer. Rather than dismissing the nexus of sexuality and the Holocaust as perverse and unnatural, because it is so upsetting to our norms, a focus on sexuality allows us to understand and empathize with the protagonists, be it victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. While the sexuality of the perpetrators has been widely studied, the victims' experiences remain far less known. The articles in this issue take up this challenge to shed light on the victims' world.

Moreover, it is almost exclusively the heterosexual relationships that received attention. Little is known about the queerness of both perpetrators and victims, a challenge taken up in this special issue.

In this enterprise, we stand on the shoulders on decades of feminist scholarship and queer historiography. These have, often against considerable resistance and dismissal,

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established women and gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation as valid categories of historical analysis. The early generations of historians of homosexuality pushed for rewriting queer actors into history and recreating a lost canon. However, these approaches are often inspired by a search and celebration of historical forbears, be it persecuted gay and lesbians or doubly oppressed Holocaust victims. While understandable and important, “these hard-fought battles of reclamation” created a circumscribed vision of history, with gender and sexuality understood as a hard category.\(^\text{33}\)

The articles in this issue seek to historicize sexuality in the Holocaust. Intimacy, love, sexual violence, and same sex desire translated into different meaning during the Second World War to what it does today, but also what it meant in the decade before or after. In historicizing sexuality, the authors in this issue show the meaning and forms sexuality might take changed from site to site, be it during hiding, in concentration camps, on the Eastern front, in ghettos, among Jewish partisans, or along the killing sites of the Einsatzgruppen. Intimacy signified different things to a 30-year old French female volunteer worker in Berlin (Fauroux in this issue), than to a 27-year old religious Jewish woman from Pinsk in hiding (Gusarov), or a 21-year old German sailor in Latvia (Mühlhäuser). Conversely, stigma could arise from various reasons: Some people experienced shame connected to the sexuality they participated in, others were pressured

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\(^{31}\) See a closer discussion in Evans, ‘Why Queer German History,’ p. 372. For an example of hard categories, see A. Zinn, *Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt*? Homosexuelle Männer im Nationalsozialismus (Frankfurt/Main, 2018).
by their surroundings into feeling uncomfortable, and yet others inflicted shame on the partners they assaulted.

Scholars have pointed out the janus-faced effects of sexuality in war in that it brought destruction as well as pleasure. This double-edgedness further contributes to stigma. Specifically, it is the complexity and spectrum of relationships that came about during the Third Reich that makes us uneasy. Perhaps one way to deal with this discomfort has been the tendency to see the sexuality in the Holocaust as a binary of two exclusive categories: romantic love and sexual violence. But because in fact most sexual experiences at this time took place somewhere between these poles, a frequent reaction is disconcertion, a strategy of distancing. The contributions in this issue explore this unease, while showing a way for a more differentiated understanding that embraces the ambivalent meanings that intimacy in wartime could carry.

Sexuality in the Holocaust took many forms between aggression, sexual barter, and affection. In the victim society, camps and ghettos, being able to be sexually active on one’s own terms was often recognized as a symbol of status. Not all victims were equal; some sought and purchased sex from others, rather than helping them altruistically; some prisoners engaged in sexual violence against their fellow inmates. These insights are disturbing - one of the reasons why these issues have been addressed only rarely. In addition, Regina Mühlhäuser presents in the article in this issue a bold and systematic analysis of sexual violence: what was rape for the victims, their attackers could see as prostitution. Rather than demonize the perpetrators (and thus operate the stigma of sexual otherness), we need to address and analyze both perspectives, together.

The importance of the feminist predecessors is the more important given the long-standing reluctance of majority historiography to venture into these spaces. For decades,

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historians rejected that sexual violence was prevalent; in fact, as Regina Mühlhäuser shows, the struggle for analysis of sexual violence became a pars pro toto for gender studies of the Holocaust. Even with the advent of gender in Holocaust studies, some scholars continued to argue that gender was irrelevant in the world of the camps.  

Yet others believed that the weakened, starved prisoners were too exhausted to engage in any sexuality. These views were largely ahistorical reading inspired by the expectation of a fairly flat, homogeneous, celibate prisoner society.

The articles in front of you show how the war constantly changed gender roles, but how men, and women, were simultaneously kept to the old standards. Those who broke against the old models were judged, sometimes, but not always, stigmatized. We can observe it on an example from Camille Fauroux, who discusses how for some younger French women, volunteer labor service in Germany was seen as a chance to escape patriarchal dependence. Yet these voluntary workers were viewed in France, and remain to this date, as “shameless.” In another layer, the camp accommodation where the French voluntary workers were accommodated made it impossible to be alone during private activities such as sleeping, changing, washing, or intimacy. Some of these gestures were unavoidable, such as washing or changing. Still, women observed in these acts — half-dressed or naked, kissing, or embracing — were again marked as “shameless.” Jennifer Evans and Elissa Mailänder demonstrate how the seemingly identical act of male cross-dressing could be performed as masculinity-affirming in one context, and profoundly disturbing, stigmatized, and un-German in another. Finally, Anna Hájková discusses sexual barter and romantic relationships in the concentration camps. But while heterosexual romance was seen


as normal, and heterosexual barter was grudgingly accepted, queer relationships, rational or romantic, were viewed by the prisoner society as unnatural and deviant. These examples, and the contradiction in them, show that the creation of stigma is far from “natural” or logical, but rather, it follows to enforce a normative notion, independently whether it is realistic.

The best known among the stigmatized topics is sexual violence. Regina Mühlhäuser’s summarizes the force of this stigma: “Rape victims are often perceived as having lots their bodily and spiritual integrity, forever damaged and morally compromised.” This taboo already emerged in the postwar sexualized imagination which tackled the fact that Jewish men were murdered while Jewish women first raped and only then killed. These sexualized postwar tropes emerged as a trope for understanding the genocide, but they brought on their heels a fascination with sexual violence in the Holocaust, making it almost impossible for women to speak about their experience earnestly. The early postwar narratives sometimes spoke with matter-of-factness about sexual violence, because the narrators had not yet been confronted with the social framework of shaming. Second wave feminism brought about a change with the publication of Susan Brownmiller’s Against Our Will and later the sexual violence of the Yugoslav War made it impossible to turn away as Regina Mühlhäuser’s article shows. By then, oral history interviewers started asking the question or the interviewees brought up the topic. Today, sexual violence is an accepted part of study of the Holocaust, addressed in exhibitions as well as general Holocaust histories. Instead of simply pathologizing the perpetrators, Mühlhäuser explores the various

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18 N. Shik, „Infinite loneliness: some aspects of the lives of Jewish women in the Auschwitz camps according to testimonies and autobiographies written between 1945 and 1948,” in D. Bergen (ed.), Lessons and legacies. VIII, From generation to generation (Evanston, 2008), pp. 125-158.

meanings of rape. She asks, what did sexual violence mean to the perpetrators? Her answers demonstrate why we need to understand rape as an inherent part of the German war campaign and strategy of warfare: many soldiers understood rape as of violence, rather than as sex.

In the summer of 1944, when she was a 19-year old prisoner of Dessauer Ufer, a Hamburg satellite camp of Neuengamme, the Hamburg Jewish woman Lucille Eichengreen was sexually assaulted. She had found a scarf that she wanted to wrap around her shaved head and hid it between her legs. When a guard assaulted her, groping her, he felt the rags, and misunderstood that she was menstruating. The man was disgusted: “You dirty useless whore! Phooey! You’re bleeding!” The guard’s error saved Eichengreen from rape. The irony at hand is that the guard was disgusted by a natural bodily function, menstruation; it was the attempted rape that should revolt us. This example reminds us, along with Regina Mühlhäuser and Dorota Glowacka’s contributions, of the ethical necessity of listening to the victims’ experience in their own words. They also show the slow change in what was seen as “the worst thing that can happen to a woman/man” and “unspeakable.” While sexual violence against women has become an experience that after decades of silence and dismissal has made it into the core of Holocaust studies, men as victims of sexual abuse is an entirely new topic, largely unknown.

Unlike sexual violence, prostitution, sex work, and sexual barter is still seen as inherently shameful. The roots of the perceived disgrace lie in the immediate postwar period, perhaps

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already the period of persecution. A narrative in which (even presumed) prostitution was interpreted as complicity with the Nazis took hold already in the pre-independence Palestine.\textsuperscript{24} Holocaust historians have been influenced by this stigma: they are profoundly disturbed by occurrences of sexual barter; most of them avoid the topic all together, and if it is discussed, it is almost always interpreted as sexual violence in which women have little to no (meaningful) control.\textsuperscript{25} On the flipside, in her 2017 study of French POWs’ relationships with German women, Cornelia Usborne indicated how eye-opening it can be to go against established narratives of virile man (albeit taken prisoner) for whom sex with the enemy woman is a conquest rather than subjugation.\textsuperscript{26} When we compare Usborne’s findings with that of Glowacka in this volume, it shows that the decisive factor is the gender of the partner purchasing the intimate acts. If it is a man, we tend to read the act as violent; if it is a woman, as consensual. The challenge here is again not to internalize the assumption in the source, but to think and question the views presented as “natural.”

Did the Jewish women, and men, who bartered intimacy to survive have any control? It is difficult and confusing recognizing victims’ agency in what were largely enforced, asymmetrical, and dependent situations. Other histories of prostitution show that the conditions in which women and men sold sex were very often exploitative, be it in 1840s Southampton, 1900 Buenos Aires, or 1920s Berlin. At the same time, the scholarship has shown that these conditions did not


\textsuperscript{24} I. Zertal, \textit{From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel} (Berkeley, 1998), 268f; Bos, ‘Sexual violence,’ 117.


\textsuperscript{26} C. Usborne, ‘Female Sexual Desire and Male Honor: German Women’s Illicit Love Affairs with Prisoners of War during the Second World War,’ \textit{Journal of the History of Sexuality}, 26,3 (September 2017), pp. 454-488; and Dorota Glowacka in this issue.
mean the sex workers had no agency, nor that they universally saw their work as disgraceful. Such a contextualization is much needed, as unfortunately most Holocaust studies take place outside of the history of prostitution. Holocaust scholars seem to engage in far-reaching exceptionalism, as if contextualization to other fields of history would make lessen the genocide.

When Marie Jalowicz Simon’s memoir of hiding in wartime Berlin came out in 2014, her book radically challenged the lasting perceptions of altruistic survival. Readers were captivated by her prosaic narrative of bartering her rescue for money, aid, cleaning, affection, company, and sex. Simon’s memoir showed that sex was a currency, and one currency among others. The choice Simon had was to stay and provide what was asked of her, or search for another hiding place (and be potentially caught). Sometimes, she left.

In her contribution, Katya Gusarov builds on this model, but complicates it further: she writes on occupied Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, where there were no rescue networks comparable to Berlin. The Jewish women who were taken in and asked to provide sex had this one chance; the other option was dying. Their rescuers were risking their lives, where the Berlin helpers could have walked away with a warning, or perhaps a prison sentence. What does sex as counter value mean in such a situation? It was usually the one thing the Jewish women (and sometimes men) could offer. It served as existential affirmation, as promise, communication, and hierarchy statement: of acceptance of the rescuer as equal - or more often, their dependency. Moreover, an example from the Buchach ghetto in occupied Ukraine shows that the rescue provided was not a given: some gentile men would come to the ghetto, select Jewish young women, take them away with the promise of helping them survive in hiding. A few months later,

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when the women were pregnant, the gentile men sent the women back, to their deaths, or delivered them to the Germans. Rather than insisting that their help should have been given altruistically, we need to seek out the historical logic, to which belongs whether the help was provided in good faith.

The stigma surrounding sexual barter profoundly influenced postwar testimonies, in which first person narratives of sex work disappeared almost completely. This dearth of sources makes Simon’s memoir and Gusarov’s essay so precious. Most existing sources operate in binary categories of romantic love and sexual violence as possible narratives. For instance, in Berlin a sizeable number of Jews survived in hiding. Some of them referred episodes of sexual coercion, more frequent, however, are stories of partnerships between the rescuers and the hidden. These stories are usually told in the romantic frame, but a closer look at the marriages closed after the liberation would show dependencies and coercion. That does not automatically mean these marriages were any less genuine and the couples happy than any others who met under more “normal circumstances.” Two expectations shaped these narratives: first, the gratitude for having one’s life saved made it difficult to thematize power asymmetries. In addition, stigma surrounding sexual barter made any questions relating to it were deemed unsuitable to ask.

The contributions by Dorota Glowacka, Katya Gusarov, and Anna Hájková look at sexual barter between love, agency, and coercion. They closely explore victims’ agency and propose differentiating between rape and violent sexual barter, thus whether the victim had any choice, or not, to engage in sex. They suggest we read stories about romantic rescue with skepticism. They also propose that we identify, do not internalize, but instead analyze the frequent judgments in

stories. To understand the place of sexual barter in the Holocaust, these authors suggest, it is necessary to ask about the value of the matters bartered for sexual services; while a capo in a concentration camp could coerce a teenager into providing sex for extra rations, a gentile man hiding a Jewish woman risked his life.

Another stigmatized field of sexuality discussed in this special issue is same sex desire. It is one of the most neglected fields in Holocaust studies, which have been slow in approaching queer history beyond Nazi persecution of gay men, and to a much smaller degree, lesbian women. A similar disregard for queer desire in the Holocaust is valid for queer history.32 We seek to widen our scope of queerness in the Holocaust; Evans’ and Mailänder’s, Fauroux’s, Glowacka’s, and Hájková’s contributions substantiate a field in which same sex desire has various meanings and impact. In these, Nazi persecution is but one perspective, offering various additional, often intersectional readings. Anneliese Kohlmann, the self-identified lesbian guard in Hamburg in Hájková’s essay, was aware that female homosexuality was not a criminal offense, but also of the camp-wide ban on same sex female relationships.33 Kohlmann engaged in a coerced relationship with a prisoner, Helene Sommer. Her affection for Sommer made her pass the line between guards and prisoners, and eventually follow her, at great personal cost, to Bergen Belsen in the last week of war. Prisoners’ homophobic reactions towards Kohlmann were rooted in the notion of a monstrous lesbian guard and her sexual “perversion” played an aggravating role during her postwar trial.

The camps and ghettos introduced a possibility of queer kinship. Same sex prisoner families were seen as a threat to what Judith Butler has called the “heterosexual matrix,” the base of our society which links normative gender and sexual expression, contributing to the

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32 For instance, the recent global encyclopedia of LGBT history has no entries on queer Holocaust victims: Howard Chiang (ed.), Global encyclopedia of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) history (New York, 2019).
homophobia of the prisoner society. Insights such as these offer a way in for scholars of queer history: Rather than seeing the Holocaust as a unique event out of time and place, we need to examine it as a chance, and opportunity, to observe human society.

The special issue suggests that we need to take leave from the notion of bounded sexual identities, in particular an assumed binary between hetero- and homosexual. These hard categories do not do justice to how fluid sexuality is. Only rarely do we know how these people self-identified. If they did call themselves “homosexual” — such as the persecuted “transvestite” Fritz Kitzing (Evans and Mailänder) in police arrest in 1935 — it reflects more on the circumstance in which they spoke (which could be violent and coercive) and the social framing of language than about their actual sense of self. Conversely, the camps opened an opportunity, consensual or coerced, to redefine sexual orientation, gender roles, indeed gender per se. In the single sex camps for foreign workers in Berlin (Fauroux), a 22-years old French Lucienne could fall in love with Marie, who was eight years older, and unlike her had previous same sex experience.

Glowacka’s examination of male-male rape, violent sexual barter, and subsequent homophobic interpretation by the victims presents an argument for gender binary being at the core of the problem.

What to make of the sexual orientation and sexual practices beyond binary categories of homo- vs heterosexuality is another issue raised in this special issue. Foucault’s famous argument that modern homosexuality (as opposed to same sex desire) is an invention of the 19th century was for German context echoed by Robert Beachy, who showed how late 19th century Berlin

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discovered homosexuality. Indeed, many of the Jewish victims, and not only those from assimilated Western and Central European families, were aware of the categories as “homosexual” or “lesbian.” But analyzing the sexual acts in the concentration camps, placed in the middle of the 20th century, goes beyond the Foucauldian chronology, and challenges of sexual orientation as an identity. Take following three examples from Hájková’s essay: the guard Anneliese Kohlmann apparently identified as a lesbian; the Viennese Jewish teenager Ditha was intimate with her girlfriend Margot, but it was only with her, and only in the camps, that she engaged in same sex intimacy; and Helene Sommer, who became Kohlmann lover out of coercion and choice to survive. In this time, Sommer, who even in Auschwitz appeared markedly feminine, reportedly presented as butch. Is it that in monosexual camps, same sex acts were simply sex acts? Such questions deserve to be further investigated. The special issue suggest that rather than insisting on one homosexual identity, we should focus on its mutability, ambiguity, and very often, simply practices and acts. We suggest the use of the denomination “queer” not as an indication of identity, but instead as an umbrella term of non-heteronormative desires and acts.

We show the queer protagonists in all their ambivalence, as coercive, sexually violent, and abusive. Discussing coerced and violent queer encounters in the camps or cross-dressing genocidal soldiers makes for a difficult reading. Stories like that are a radical departure from dominant narratives of persecution and suffering. However, as Jennifer Evans and Heike Bauer remind us, in order to continue professionalizing queer history, we need to depart from its “civilizing” narrative. And yet, these people found pleasure, solace, and strength in these acts.

One of the few well documented stories of “men with a pink triangle” was Karl Gorath of

38 Evans, ‘Why Queer German History,’ p. 374.
40 H. Bauer, The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, death, and modern queer culture (Philadelphia, 2017); Evans, „Why queer German history.”
Bremerhaven, who survived three years in Auschwitz. Lutz van Dijk and Jörg Hutter reminds us that Gorath’s time as block elder, when he had a Polish prisoner as lover, which he recalled as “the happiest time of his life”, was apparently a relationship exploiting the dependencies between an “Aryan” capo and a rank prisoner.\textsuperscript{41} 

The persecution of queer women in Nazi Germany is a largely disregarded topic; queer history is not immune to patriarchal perspective:\textsuperscript{42} Much of the scholarship on the Nazi persecution of LGBT people has taken the paragraph §175a, that addressed only male same sex acts, as a point of departure. One example of the condescension towards the experience of lesbian women during Nazi Germany is the ongoing struggle to commemorate women persecuted as lesbians at the Ravensbrück Memorial.\textsuperscript{43} The logic of insisting on §175a (and its absence) to make sense of the situation of women who engaged in same sex intimacy is not helpful. The Nazis made use of various legal paragraphs to persecute non-heteronormative conduct: §74 (sex with dependents), §176 (child abuse), §183 (causing a public disturbance), and §361/6 (public solicitation).\textsuperscript{44} Moreover, as Laurie Marhoefer argued with the example of the Würzburg resistance fighter Ilse Totzke, Nazi persecution of queer desire could also be situational and intersectional: it depended on class, race, social capital, and work position. Evans and Mailänder show that Kitzing’s position was so vulnerable because of his class background and his presumed job as sex worker. Fauroux’s French workers, threatened with §183, were able to push back, to a point.

\textsuperscript{42} A bibliography on lesbian and trans women in Nazi Germany with many full texts is at www.sexualityandholocaust.com/bibliography.
\textsuperscript{44} J, Dobler, „Unzucht und Kuppelei: Lesbianverfolgung im Nationalsozialismus,” in I. Eschebach (ed.), Homophobie und Devianz: Weibliche und männliche Homosexualität im Nationalsozialismus (Berlin, 2012), pp. 53-62; see also contributions of Evans & Mailänder and Fauroux in this volume.
Writing on stigmatized sexuality in the Holocaust poses particular methodological and ethical challenges. Jennifer Evans’ invitation that to queer the past is to view it skeptically, taking nothing for granted, is immensely helpful here. The real opportunity of critical history of sexuality is in its innate subversivity: reading sources against the grain, thinking about the silenced voices and the missing other perspective, recognizing how the Nazi persecution and the emerging camp society transformed gender norms. One challenge is recognizing materials as relevant: to an untrained eye, many events will appear too quotidian to analyze to make a point. We need to analyze, rather than accept, ingrained assumptions and judgments in the sources. Language presents another issue: it can be challenging to find neutral expressions that describe the activity we seek to describe without casting judgment — unless this is the statement we truly want to make. One example to illustrate: in writing my article, I wracked my brain how to paraphrase a survivors’ misogynist characterization of Helene Sommer as sexually active with changing partners without making judgment. I asked for advice and saw that many colleagues shared the same difficulties: some suggestions were ahistorical, others lascivious or judgmental. It deemed on me that our culture has no positive or neutral expressions for women who have numerous sexual partners. This circumstance itself is extremely telling, if infuriating. Language carries stigma in itself. It is necessary to go over one’s prose again, and again, asking: is this the meaning I am trying to convey? Do I approach my protagonists with respect?

Respect and dignity are a hard virtue to come by in extreme situations such as genocide, and this difficulty extends to the histories of it. What are historian’s ethics in writing about sexual violence, and by extension, sexuality? Elissa Mailänder showed how difficult, indeed impossible, it is to we have empathy with people about all we learn about them is that they were sexually

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45 Evans, „Why Queer German Studies”; see also Doan, Disturbing Practices, p. 5.
assaulted. Can we, for instance, exhibit photographs of rape? For decades, the exhibition of the Wannsee Conference Memorial included blown up photographs of the L‘viv pogrom from July 1941 that included images of women who just had been assaulted, their faces screaming, chased in the streets with torn underwear. Judith Cohen, the head of the photograph archive at the National Institute for Holocaust Documentation of the USHMM offered a useful approach that we ought to think the person in the image were our parent. How would we wish for them to be exhibited? But then, the scholar’s idea of appropriate exhibiting can be different to the descendants of the people in a photo. There is a long-standing tradition of sexualizing Holocaust victims: for a long time, sexual violence carried a symbolic meaning of the genocide, which is why it became such a powerful trope of the Holocaust. The lasting implementation of this metaphor, however, has contributed to a voyeuristic, pornographic framework. Some Holocaust historians chose to mention sexual violence as a fact in passing, to illustrate the horrors.

Those who study Holocaust and sexuality carry a special responsibility to convey their protagonists’ choices and actions with empathy. They need to be depicted as human beings, with personality, complexity, thoughts and motives. This can be a hard task when we write about people we detest — the raping German soldier or the Polish foreman who demands sex from the Jewish mothers he hides. But as Regina Mühlhäuser and Katya Gusarov show in their contributions, in seeking to understand their actions we gain better insights into the various aspects of society in moments of genocide. But to understand them in first place, we need to do them justice and avoid pre-existing judgments. The same challenge applies when analyzing behavior we may find difficult among Holocaust victims: the lack of solidarity, homophobia, sexual violence, or sexual barter. But rather than upsetting, these insights should show the

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47 Bos, ‘Sexual violence.’
Holocaust victims beyond powerlessness, and instead position them as thinking, acting, and erring people, who they remained until the last. The challenge at hand is connecting empathic reading with stringent analysis; a taxing task since examining violence and mass murder, yet this is the way forward.

The exacting issue of agency repeats when we come to sources. When discussing stigmatized sexuality, the lasting issue is that the societal norms of shame, ostracization, and exclusion have usually silenced those whose voices we seek to recover. Gayatri Spivak’s rhetorical question “Can the subaltern speak?” is particularly relevant here.⁴⁹ But while Spivak’s answer was that we can ultimately only locate silences and inquire about their larger meaning, the articles collected here offer a different response. Yes, in particular oral histories have largely been erased of marginalized voices.⁵⁰ But perhaps because the ongoing research and building on the work of our predecessors has led to more materials; or the European context offering different, and more widespread archival materials; or our method, comparison and contextualization, has become more sophisticated: The authors present voices of people who were supposed to be silenced, who speak, indicate, and give signs about their experience, anguish, hopes, wishes, loss, and sometimes survival.

Where should the future research go? We very much hope to inspire followers who will explore difficult topics in history of sexuality and gender. For Jewish Holocaust history, critical, analytical accounts of masculinity such as Glowacka presents are still rare.⁵¹ These would address changed gender roles in which men could be sexually exploited. In fact, examining how gender, and sexual acts transformed in the concentration camps presents a particular challenge, not only of insight for gender studies. Sexual barter, prostitution, and queer experience represent largely

⁵⁰ Ringelheim, „The Split Between Gender,” 341-342 and Glowacka’s, Gusarov’s, and Hájková’s, contributions.
⁵¹ Important exceptions include K. Wünschmann, Before Auschwitz: Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps (Cambridge, MA., 2015); Sommer, KZ-Bordell; and Glowacka in this volume.
uncharted territory. Overall, stories of sexual stigma will profit being read in the context of other marginalized victims, the “asocials”, “habitual criminals”, the disabled, homeless, sex workers, alcoholics, women with frequent sexual partners, youth doomed to be “difficult to educate,” and many others who did not fit into the ideal of folk community. Their social inappropriateness was often marked up as sexually deviant. Overall, on the way forward, historians of sexuality in the Holocaust will need to thread a path that is analytical yet empathic, rooted in feminist and queer approaches. They will find out again and again: the story they are writing is not only a past one, it is inherently political. Returning those who were deemed unworthy of history back into our knowledge of what is the past is not only academic history; it is an act of social justice.

The articles in this special issue are based on the conference Holocaust, Sexuality, Stigma that took place in December 2017 in Berlin as cooperation of the University of Warwick, Schwules Museum, and the Gorki Theater. The organizers, Birgit Bosold and Anna Hájková, would like to thank the Kulturstiftung des Bundes for the generous support. The conference made a point of including participants who were activists of lesbian past; an article-long interview with them sketching their take on many of the matters discussed here appeared elsewhere. Unfortunately, due to family circumstances, Birgit Bosold had to withdraw as editor.

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52 Hájková and Bosold, 'Aktivistinnen des lesbischen Gedenkens.'